

## The Narrative of Lesbian Gays and Bisexual in Iran and the Chronic Closet

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### ABSTRACT

By using the snowballing and Grounded Theory approach, research was conducted during the course of one year to narrate the continuous struggle of Lesbian, Gays, and Bisexuals in Iran to come out of the closet. This is the first study conducted inside Iran exploring the presence of LGB in Iran along with their agonies and pain. The present research study *Forbidden Tale; A Comprehensive Study on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) in Iran (2018)* contributes a unique dimension to the literature on LGB by focusing specifically on Iran. This article presents one aspect of a comprehensive study that demonstrates the prevalence of LGB in Iran. The research study presents an overview and exploration of the dynamics of LGBT individuals in Iran that employs fieldwork as a base. This intense research centred on in-depth interviews with over 400 individuals (60% male and 40% female) in 3 major Iranian cities: Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan. This research study reveals to the readers that Iran is not an exception when it comes to the prevalence of LGB and whilst homosexuality has gained greater social acceptance in many Western societies, it remains highly stigmatized, in most cases forbidden and potentially lethal in Islamic countries. This article negates the famous statement of the Iranian Ex-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in which he claims that "In Iran, we don't have homosexuals". The article also shed light on the fact that Iranian LGB is still in the closet due to the lack of family support and the cultural/religious barriers.

**Keywords:** LGB, LGBT, Iran, Closet, Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Homosexuality, Gay, lesbian, bio-sexual, Gender.

### INTRODUCTION

Today in Iran, there is a veiled battle being waged: the war for sexual identities. There is a struggle for LGB individuals to keep hidden their identities which is creating mental disorders. The question "to come out or not to come out" has made a suffocating environment for homosexuals and bisexuals to survive. Homosexuality is a growing crime in many of the Middle Eastern states including Iran and is punishable by death in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iran (Ungar 2002). Chronic abuses and horrific incidences are seldom reported in the international media. Speculation as to why this population is hidden includes the controversial nature

of homosexuality, religious extremism, regional differences in accepted sexual practices, and even international politics.

"In Iran, we don't have homosexuals, like in your country" It would seem that former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was a little off when he declared that there were no homosexuals in his country. The statement of the Iranian president in 2007 was a game changer in the region where he clearly denied the existence of LGB in Iran. In this way, he flushed out a whole lot of population from the country's landscape and excludes them with their identities.

This mind-set stems from Iranian's strong religious leadership, which bans premarital sex and condemns homosexuals to death. Since the Islamic revolution in Iran, there have been strenuous but not always successful efforts to bury this past (Jaspal 2014). Of all the Muslim countries, Iran at the moment is probably one of the active in persecuting gay people. This article examines this unvisited field of sexuality in Iran by looking into the multiple complex dimensions of sexual identity and nuances within the LGB community against a rising recognition of one's sexual orientation. This study challenges misunderstandings of LGB and sexuality in Iran by scrutinising the myths and narratives that have so often misinformed gender, development policy, and practice, in order to inspire a more inclusive approach. It tells us that sadly Iran is not an exception when it comes to the exclusion of LGB population from the basic infrastructure of society and that is the reason they prefer to remain in the closet.

The necessity of focusing on the LGB society and the vulnerability of its oppressed and silenced members was the motivation to shed light on the state of affairs of LGB individuals who have been intentionally neglected and socially marginalized. There have not been many freely conducted surveys or personal research studies on LGBT in Iran where researchers have been able to contribute to the existing body of already acquired knowledge about the LGBT community. Restrictions from the system and within the universities and the stigma of such an isolated highly sensitive issue have made social activists, students and researchers less willing to work on this subject. Outside of Western countries, psychological research on Sexual Orientation Violence (SOV) in Iran is almost non-existent because the country's Management denies the presence of the LGB population. This current study fills this acute gap of information.

### **LGBT IN IRAN-THE MISSING PIECES**

Homosexuality has always been a contentious topic in Iran due to the stigma surrounding the homophobic views of certain members of society, which related to a "radicalized view of sexuality, cultural norms concerning sexuality and gender, and connections to religious institutions (Moghissi 2016). Iran is a traditional society that operates on a basic premise that

homosexuality is an abnormality. Traditional society dealing with what are assumed abnormalities such as heterosexuals is not a new story in Iran nor is the combat against it, but the manner in which Iran exposes perceived "abnormalities" to maintain control over its sexual the minorities is yet a controversial issue rooted in its past and carrying on in the present. An extract from the work of Mehrangiz Kar concludes that "Members of the LGBT community in Iran are viewed as the ones who depart significantly from mainstream religious values or social expectations. LGBT rights activists thus face huge obstacles in their efforts towards accommodating their identity in the current context of Iranian society"<sup>1</sup>.

In Iran, there is no standardized measure of gender binaries. Sexual desires are bound to intricate deep-rooted ever-lasting social definitions to such a significant extent that sometimes it is difficult for homosexuals themselves to distinguish, understand and accept their own orientations. In Iran, when enquiring about someone's gender, one cannot find an appropriate response that yields a third possibility. Either one is a man or a woman. This fact is so categorically clear cut that it has left no questionable room of doubt. Any departure from this dual sexual system of classification in Iran is categorized under the auspice of mental and behavioural disorders. Iran emphasizes the complementarity and unity of the two sexes, each associated with distinguishable gender roles. Given that homosexuality can undermine the Iranian patriarchal social structure, Iran and Islamic ideology strictly oppose homosexuality (Afary 1997).

Interestingly, amongst all members of the LGBT community in Iran, bisexuals are the one category in the sexual orientation framework that receives less attention. This area of research of bisexuality in Iran suffers from the lack of available literature and the overriding rationale that bisexuality in Iran is a sin. The general perceived notion in Iran is not favourable for this category of LGB. Even homosexuals consider bisexuality is not only an insult to heterosexuality, but is not even categorized in the Lesbian-Gay binary. In many respects, bisexuals are viewed as the "unacceptable" within an already unacceptable group. In addition to a thorough analysis of the

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<sup>1</sup> Iranian's Queers & Laws:  
<http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=9885> {Accessed April 12, 2018}

LGB discourse in Iran, this research study also revealed an uncomfortable fact: the un-acceptance of bisexuals was the norm and frequently the familiar attitude.

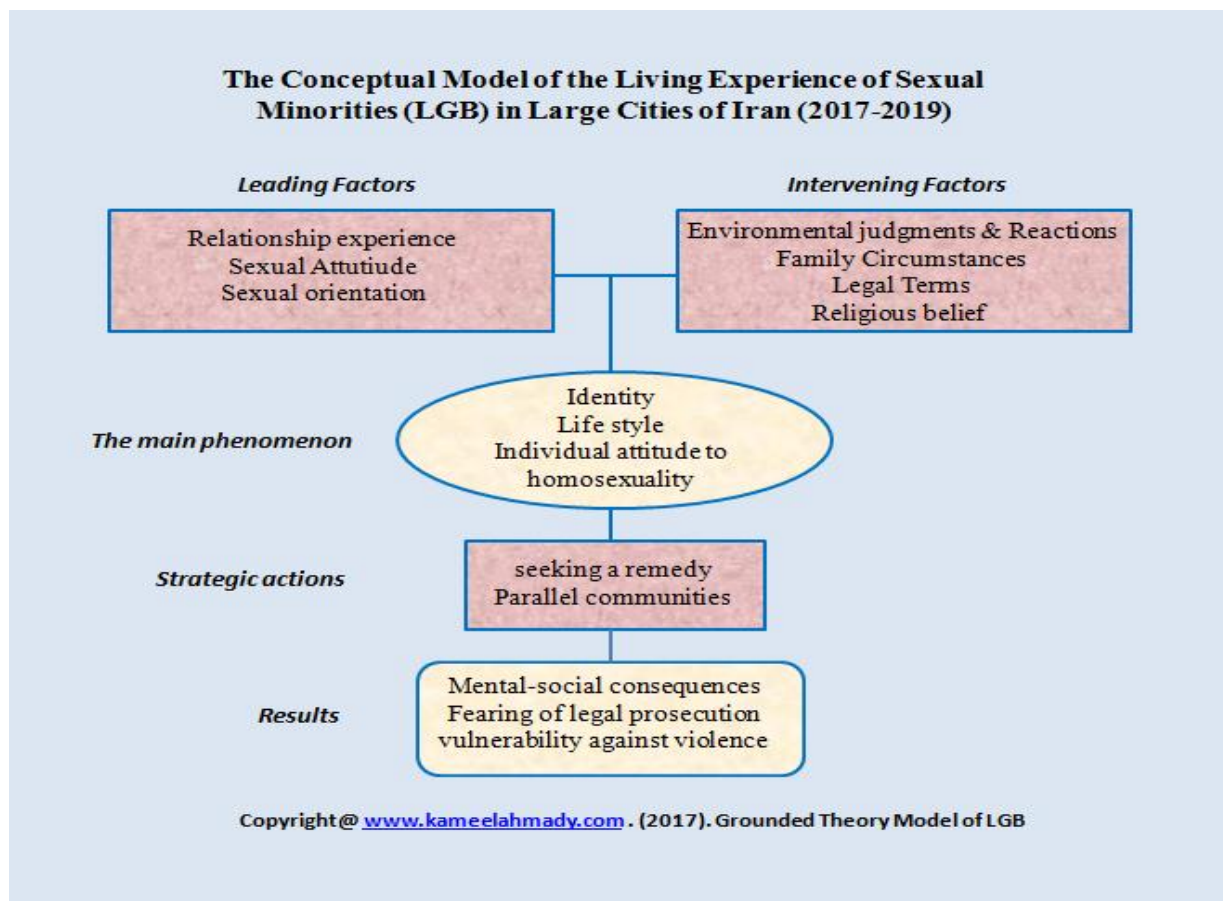
This light-handed approach is not the same for women. LGB have been oppressed during the sociocultural transformations in contemporary in Iran while Femi phobic attitudes have been central to this marginalization. Notwithstanding the profound distortion of the concepts of femininity and masculinity in the course of the modernization and islamization of the country, defeminisation of the public space and prioritization of the masculinity in gender discourses have been crucial to all social transitions that intend to feed their desired social-ideal identity.

What is more revealing is that women, even amongst the sexual minorities (Lesbians) in comparison to gays and male bisexuals, suffer more from societal restrictions and risk harsher social repercussions and punishments when caught (Blumenfeld 1993). Women are already marginalized in Iranian

society as the demands of their patriarchal society and draconian policies define their existence (Afshar, 2005). They are even more so marginalized if they are lesbian. Frequently familiar and none at all surprising is that there is a heightened level of discrimination towards women even within the category of sexual minorities.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study *Forbidden Tale; A Comprehensive Study on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) in Iran (2018)* is emblematic of mixed methodologies meaning that the social interpretations and results are mainly driven from the Ground Theory (GT) method. Thus the interviews that incorporated a wide aspect of LGB lives were analyzed and noted through the GT method of coding. The Grounded Theory method, as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) is the "theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process"(Corbin and Strauss 2008).



A number of open-ended questions were purposefully designed so the interviewed LGB individual felt free to open up and discuss at length issues and matters that they wanted to share. What was immediately observable and interesting was that a significant majority were keen to share their ideas, their thoughts and talk about material issues. It was also readily obvious to the research team that the poignant LGB discourse needs to be heard from the LGB community itself.

The sets of localized questions were decided as the main cores of interview directions and in each part, the questions and the relevant track of the talk were different for lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.

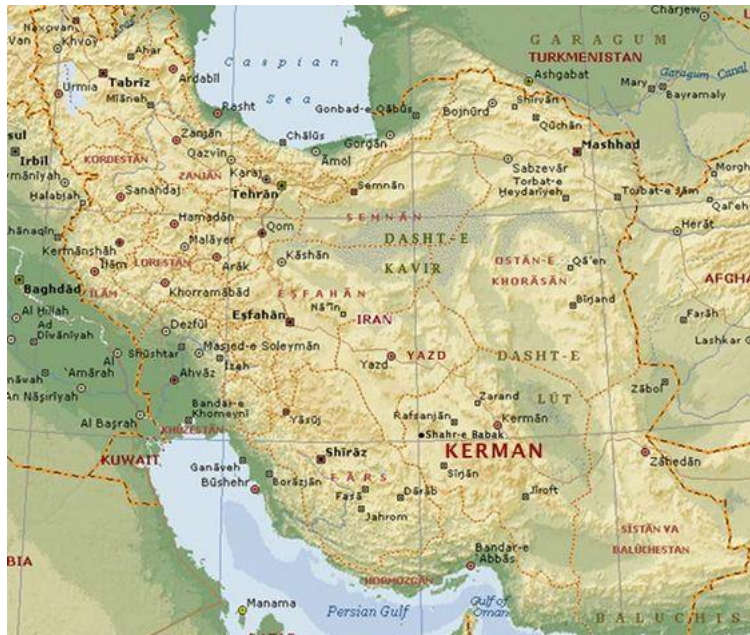
Whilst the face-to-face interviews were being conducted, the researchers wrote down field notes and recorded observations and impressions of the LGB individuals. After each interview, additional descriptive and reflective notes were compiled. This afforded a source of triangulation for the data, as well as a background for a more complete picture of LGB individuals. By doing so, the researcher was able to ascertain other aspects about the strength of the LGB individuals and triangulate the information by using multiple forms of data, sources, and methods to corroborate the evidence that was uncovered.

The data for this research study was collected over the course of one year between 2016 and 2017. Most projects of this nature lack sound methodology and often suffer under the almost inevitable weakness of convenience sampling. LGB individuals in Iran belong to a silenced minority who often are compelled to hide their sexual orientation from their families and friends out of a well-founded fear of reprisals and social rejection. A unique feature of the scope of this research study is that it focuses only on LGB and not Transgender and or

Transsexual individuals (who possess two different sides of sexuality that operate simultaneously). Transgender is normally part of the LGBT acronym. Transsexuals have been intentionally excluded from this study as their status in Iran is somewhat legally approved. Whilst they are recognized and legitimized in Iran, their situation is still dependent on one Fatwa line that allows them to undergo sex-change operations. In the mid-1980s a Fatwa by Iran's Supreme Cleric Imam Khomeini allowed transgender individuals officially recognized by the government to undergo sex reassignment surgery (Alipour 2017). As of 2008, Iran carries out more sex change operations than any other nation in the world except for Thailand.

The necessity of focusing on LGB society and the vulnerability of its oppressed and silenced members is of paramount importance. Nevertheless, in addressing LGB in Iranian society this is not to dismiss the various threats the transgender community faces, including being stigmatised, excluded, social or marital rejection, alienation, and economic reprisals.

Methodological barriers have been highlighted as a primary reason for the limited research with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people. Thus, strategies for anticipating and addressing potential methodological barriers are needed. To address this need, this study discusses potential challenges associated with conducting research with LGB people and describes specific strategies for addressing these challenges. Each step of the research process—from the development of research questions to interpretation and dissemination of results is discussed. This discussion concludes with a summary of recommended strategies for advancing the quality and quantity of future scholarship with LGB people.



## POPULATION & GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF THE RESEARCH

LGB individuals exist in all facets of Iranian societies and regions and are clearly not limited to any specific urban or rural area. An internal decision was made that the research would be conducted in major metropolitan cities of Iran as neither the available data nor the locals within each region would have any input or influence the outcome. To achieve the underlying essential objective, three major metropolitan cities of Iran were found to be potentially more opened minded so that LGB groups and persons might have more freedom in expression. Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan were the chosen cities. In viewing the structural mechanisms that operate against LGB persons at different levels of actions and given the cultural differences, societal contexts and decades of ruling traditions, selecting these three metropolitan cities was a wise choice. Additionally, many LGB groups from these three metropolitan cities in Iran used social networks and were habitually exposed to social media, the flurry of social networks and digital communications. Lastly, these three cities were reputed for well-known meeting spots and parks where the LGB community discreetly gathered in small groups or visited in order to bond. Some of these parks and cafes are familiar to the public especially in the city of Tehran where many LGB individuals are recognised by their appearance.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

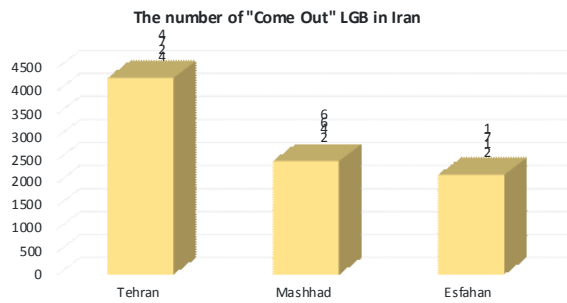
Ethical considerations were extremely important in the sampling (and collection) strategy. Moore and Miller (1999) mentioned that members of vulnerable populations often experience multiple risks that may diminish their autonomy, thus rendering them doubly (or indeed triply and so on) vulnerable (Moore & Miller 1999). This means that researchers might avoid working with people who are classified or perceived as vulnerable; consequently, their needs and concerns are not addressed within research, practice and policy arenas. Albeit there are many ethical limitations and boundaries if we are going to research on sensitive topics or groups, however, it is clear that some research questions may only be effectively addressed by recourse to work with vulnerable people (Moore & Miller 1999). For our research objectives, the research study employed numerous techniques to ensure their safety. The research study also employed ethical practices to ensure young people were not harmed by participating.

As this research study involves human subjects, Institutional Review Board permission was required. Particular attention was paid to ensure that the young people were carefully informed and understood the nature of the research. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the data and using pseudonyms for the participants, youth organizations

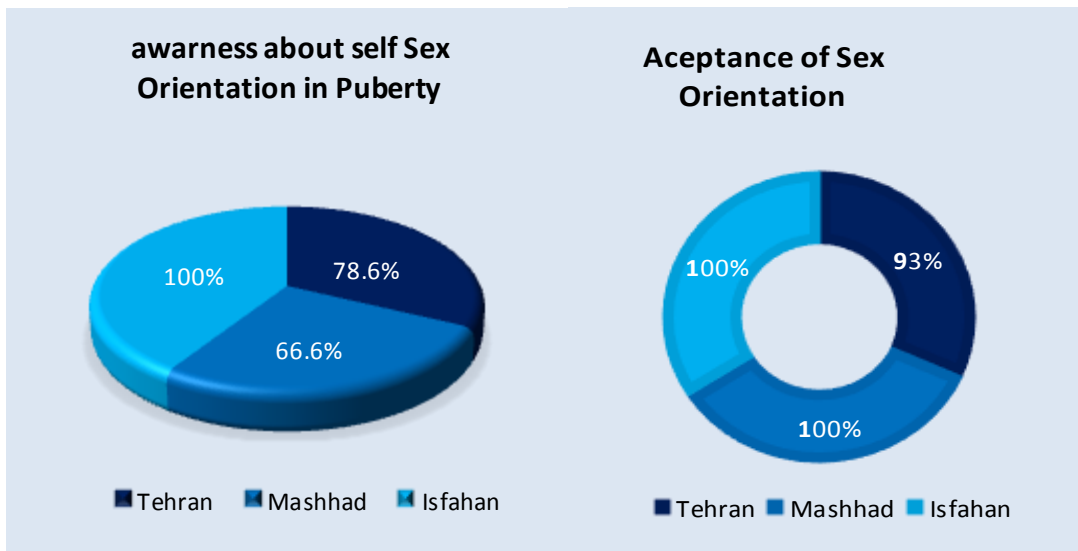
and their locations. Both the interview and observational data were collected. Participants were interviewed in a location of their choice. By informing the participants they acknowledged

that he/she understood his/her rights as a volunteer for the project, thereby giving permission to the researcher to use any data collected.

Graph 1 shows the population of LGB in Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan. On this basis, Tehran with 4274 homosexuals has the biggest number followed by Mashhad, 2466 and Isfahan, 2171



Graph 2 Shows awareness about his/her sex orientation in Puberty. Graph 3 shows acceptance of sex orientation by the LGB individuals



## THE CHRONIC CLOSETS-FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The research findings have been collected, screened, and triangulated through the GT method so that the actual situation could be visible to a vast majority of readers via diagrammatic representations and directs quotes that represent the major facets of the research study. They represent a thorough analysis of what the study gathered through a comprehensive research process in the three major and prominent cities in Iran.

Mixed method approaches were used to obtain the actual data and synchronize findings in order to reach the actual facts about their lives. Despite the draconian conditions and perpetual feelings of fear, what was revealed was a surprisingly optimistic and brighter image of what is currently taking place of LGB's individual's lives in Iran. Many of the LGB individuals were resilient. Over 400 homosexuals were interviewed in three phenomenal cities in Iran. Each city has its own ambience and significance. The interviewees gave the idea of a specific number of LGBs who have come out and are experiencing a significant amount of problems in their daily lives. The findings show that LGB are in abundance in these three selected cities as they have come out, as much as one can openly come out in Iran, within certain like-minded circles and talk openly about their sexual orientation. A brief overview of each city is given above;

The study shows that LGBT individuals' self-realisation of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is a staggering challenge to themselves as well as to the Iranian society. The study shows the percentage of homosexuals that realized their sexual orientation during puberty and accepted it as their sexual identity. It also shows how families knew and accepted homosexuality in the three cities of Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan. In Tehran, 78.6%, whilst in Mashhad 66.6% and in Isfahan 100% of the respondents reported that they were aware of their sexual orientation during the puberty phase of their development. In terms of accepting their own sexual orientation, 92.8% of the respondents in Tehran, 100% of them in Mashhad and Isfahan mentioned that they have accepted homosexuality as their sexual orientation.

## THE TWO PROMINENT CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

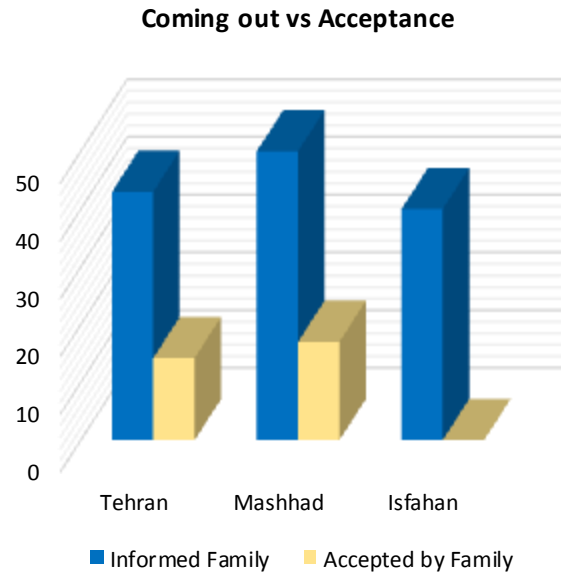
Iran's position on homosexuality is defined and acknowledged by the Iranian's government and religious clerics, therefore, LGB find it difficult to come out and declare their true sexual orientation. This is not only an Iranian issue but commonplace in countries where non-heterosexual identity has been frowned upon and or rejected. In Iran, like many other countries where homosexuality is punishable, Heterosexual unions are the only recognized ones. In such societies, a man is expected to marry, and as long as he fulfils his procreative obligations, the community does not probe into his extracurricular activities 36. Some Iranian gay men, who are in heterosexual marriages prefer prostitution as the preferred way to have same-sex affairs. For others, staying in the closet is the only viable option

Coming out is the process through which LGB individuals accept their sexual orientation or gender identity as part of their overall identity (Bilodeau 2005). It not only refers to the process of self-acceptance but also to the act of sharing one's identity with others. In Iran, the consequences of an openly homosexual relationship are severe, ranging from draconian persecution, harassment, 100 lashes and punishment by death. Homosexuality is an open secret and coming out, a difficult trajectory to walk, is simply something very few do, even in the capital city, Tehran. Many live in fear of being discovered and ousted. At the same time, Iranian homosexuals, who are condemned both for their sexuality and nonconformist gender effeminacy, have recently formed fictive kinships and backstage friendship groups in order to negotiate and attain a new social identity. Extrinsic homophobia that many gay people experience includes being bullied and called derogatory names, not having the freedom to marry, getting fired from their job, being blamed for AIDS, and becoming a victim of gay bashing. As long as gay people are subject to homophobic mistreatment, the fight to challenge homophobia needs to continue.

The research highlights two prominent factors which needs to be discussed to shed further light on the rhetoric that when the world is celebrating the sexual liberalism in West, why Iranian's LGB is still in the closet?

“Nobody in my family knows about this. I mean no one knows that I have such a tendency. It’s absolutely impossible for me to tell them what my tendency is. I am sure they will reject me, they will kill me.”

*Katayoun, 33, Tehran*



*Graph 4 shows the population of LGB in Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan Coming out vs Acceptance*

My mom recounts that from childhood I wanted to be a girl. It is even strange to me. I used to ask them to call me Farshad. I said No to wearing shirts. I was a friend to boys. Usually girls have some images of their wedding and that sort of things; at that time, I thought I could marry girls. I liked my girlfriends; I fell in love with the daughter of our neighbor. Later I fell in love with my cousin. Because the social norms tell you that being heterosexual is normal, I was thinking that was all. I thought that the right thing to do is to marry a man.

*Taimur-Age27, Mashhad*



## Family's Disapproval

LGB in Iran often deal with lack of family acceptance and support. Lack of acceptance by the community and by their family members make it very difficult for some LGB individuals to come out. They live a double life as a way to avoid jeopardizing such vital support. Staying "in the closet" helps them to avoid rejection from their family and their community, but it comes with a high price.

Coming out involves a degree of differentiation and establishment of a personal identity outside of one's family. Another reason LGB individuals might have a harder time coming out is due to difficulty in having a different identity than what is expected from their own family. A traditional Iranian family is patriarchal, and the father is the undisputed head of the family. The mother tends to encourage her children to respect their father's authority and seek his approval. For the most part, no one dares to question this system, sacrificing one's needs to gain parental approval. In most Iranian families coming out is viewed as bringing shame to their family.

Sadly, for some repercussions of "coming out" can entail family violence, homelessness or financial burden. The decision to come "out of the closet" is a continuous process that requires support from other individuals who have relevant experiences. Each individual has to assess his or her personal safety before deciding to move forward and come out. No one should be pressured or forced to come out.

As mentioned in preceding paragraphs, being in the closet is the option the LGB individual chooses due to the fear of rejection which mostly leads to abandonment by the family. In a closed knit society such as Iran, support of the family is an imperative element. One can get this support by following the societal norms and codes which are perceived indicators to live a normal life.

During the study, coming out of closets in front of parents was reported problematic by the majority of participants. As can be seen in the graph, between 40% to 50 % have reported informing their parents about their sexual orientation. Nonetheless, the ratio of acceptance is relatively low and falls between 14% to 16% in Tehran and Mashhad, whilst in Isfahan

the respondents reported as little as under %5 acceptance against the 40% of confessions to parents. Most families in Iran are socially conservative and adhere to an ironclad firm belief in societal acceptance. Even if they are aware of their child's orientation they always restrict them from sharing that part of their identity with other family members and people in their communities.

Paradoxically, the life of transgender individuals, *albeit* by no means perfect, is more comfortable than the life of homosexuals. For homosexuals, it is unfathomable to declare their true sexual orientation. Unlike homosexuals, Iran has liberal laws with regards to transgender individuals, with an encouraging government that is very supportive of financing sex changing surgeries. The 1980 *Fatwa* by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's late Supreme Leader, declared that sex assignment surgery is a "solution" to gender identity disorder (Najmabadi 2013). He allowed the government through this religious ruling to supervise such surgeries. These sorts of surgeries are commonly referred to as Gender Change Surgery (GCS). This is reported by local news that in less than four years, from 2006 to 2010, over 1,360 gender reassignment operations were performed in Iran<sup>2</sup>. These operations almost invariably lead to serious physical complications, depression, and in some cases, suicide. As sex work can be conducted legally in Iran through the Shiite notion of temporary marriage (Sigh/Mut'ah) participation in sex work is common and protected. For a trans-identified person who has undergone GCS, it is legal to have a temporary marriage conducted as often as once per hour because there is no chance of pregnancy and thus negating any future parental responsibilities on soliciting part.

LGBs in Iran dealing with multiple sets of challenges, including the struggle to come out and live an authentic life. They may not deal with Iran's oppressive government, but they still find themselves oppressed by both intrinsic and extrinsic homophobia. Growing up in a homophobic and heterosexist society contributes to the angst of shame and rejection that most gay Iranians experience. Heterosexism dictates only one kind of existence and it is being married to the opposite sex and raising children. Any deviation from such a traditional

<sup>2</sup> Iranian's Queers & Laws: <http://ir.harvard.edu/article/?a=9885> {Accessed April 12, 2018}

lifestyle is denounced by individuals and religious groups that patronize heterosexism. One can only imagine how it feels like

for LGBT people to grow up in such societies.

*28 year old bisexual from Tehran*

“I do nothing to impress the God. I neither say my prayers, nor read the Quran. I don’t fast. I swear to God and I fuck in the ass”

*23 years old Gay from Isfahan*

Well we are condemned, we live in a Muslim country we have Muslim parents and naturally we are Muslims. We believe in God and afterlife but it’s weak and I don’t say my prayers. But I have faith. I do not deny God. Nevertheless, I have relationships, I have sex, and I have always tried to separate these two dimensions. For me, the issue of being heterosexual or homosexual is not related to God, religion and hereafter. I don’t connect them to each other; I don’t think I have committed a sin. My religious beliefs are weak but I have accepted the issue easily and I have no problems.

### Factor of Religion

In poorer countries where religion and religious beliefs are more prevalent, few believe homosexuality should be accepted by society<sup>3</sup>. Religion adds another layer of pressure and continues to be a crucial factor in opposition to societal acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. What determines the types of orientations are not one person’s mere inclination but a falsely understood religion and continuously impacted by powerful socio-religious sources. It is noteworthy that a family’s religious affiliation, although linked to lower family acceptance, was positively associated with young adult LGBT social support

It is difficult to conduct an analysis of homosexuality in the Middle East without an in-depth investigation of its relationship with Islam. In addition to religious practice, the tenets of Islam are found within the everyday culture, codified law, and individual psychosocial realities of residents in the Middle East. It is so pervasive that cultural Islam is frequently distinguished from religious Islam through the designation of the term “Islamicate.” Islam is interpreted differently by different followers, but generally, its teachings regarding sexuality (homosexual or heterosexual) can be reduced to the importance of procreation and formalized frameworks for sexual activity. Increasingly, Islam is used as justification for the arrest, detention, and murder of homosexuals throughout the Middle East. “Homosexual” can be roughly translated in Arabic as “the people of Lot”, which is the basis of many anti-homosexual interpretations of the Qur’an. However, many

<sup>3</sup> Australia legalizes same-sex marriage – CNN, [www.cnn.com/2017/12/07/asia/australia-same-sex-marriage](http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/07/asia/australia-same-sex-marriage)

scholars assert that the Qur'an does not contain passages that explicitly forbid or denounce homosexuality. Instead, they argue, it has become a cultural norm to interpret the Qur'an as being anti-homosexual. The use of Islam as a basis for cultural norms has led to many arrests on charges such as "contempt of religion" for those perceived to be different (Pratt 2007).

### CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

While homosexuality is contentious in many countries, in some part of the Middle East it is the excuse for the arbitrary detention, arrest, torture, and even worse. Whether because of politics, religion, or common cultural practices, homosexuals within Iran continue to fight for their lives and their right to love. Only with the cessation of these practices and the advocacy of human rights and citizen right for all people will human beings truly achieve peace.

Although this study that the 400 individuals may not be representative of the general population of LGB individuals in Iran but by far over 400 interviews are more than enough to achieve a high standard and credible research method. This research study undoubtedly offers a window into the lives of LGB individuals in Iran who live covert lives. It is the hope that the findings and conclusions in this study will lead to new policies and interventions. Hopefully, future research studies should replicate this research with a larger, possibly nationally representative population, and outline the extent to which results vary by individual who identified as LGB.

This research study is an attempt to enable researchers and activists to reflect upon and ponder over the modes of survival in which LGBT lives can be improved in Iran operate. This was the first of its kind, to the authors' knowledge, to empirically investigate the LGB who prefer to not coming out or who came out but facing issues. The main challenge LGB in Iran is eradicating societal negative view that staunchly advocates intolerance, discrimination, and prosecution. This negative view becomes even more acute as Iranian laws and regulations approve and reinforce the unflinching un-acceptance of LGBT's existence. Raising awareness and fighting hate should be the primordial goal of NGOs social activists. The initiation of LGBT campaigns in Iranian society and having a more active presence on social media and

platforms enhances positive public perception of LGB people. This would greatly contribute to resolving and ameliorating the many issues they face when they decide to come out. Meaningful action can only happen within a favourable environment with open-minded policymakers, politicians, and the political elite. This includes alteration of traditional ideology and rigid norms. In Iran, where homosexuality is still criminalized, projects to support the social and economic inclusion of sexual minorities are either impossible to implement, or unlikely to make a significant difference. By emphasizing that LGB exclusion affects everyone, we can hopefully help countries to realise that putting an end to discrimination will reap a wide range of benefits.

The changing landscape and worldwide recognition of LGBTQ rights are demanding a change.

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